

AFFIDAVIT IN SUPPORT OF A CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

I, Steven Riedel, also referred to hereafter as “Affiant,” being first duly sworn according to law, hereby depose and state:

INTRODUCTION AND AGENT BACKGROUND

1. I am a Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and have been so since July 19, 2017. As part of my duties as an FBI Special Agent, I investigate various federal violations and crimes, including, but not limited to, conspiracies involving wire fraud and other fraudulent, criminal acts in violation of federal law. I have received training in various aspects of law enforcement, including the investigation of fraud. Through my education and experience, and that of other agents assisting in this investigation, I have become familiar with the methods that individuals use to defraud unsuspecting victims, specifically elderly victims, in “Grandparent Scams.” In Grandparent Scams criminal actors convince or attempt to convince senior citizens that their grandchildren have been arrested and need bail money.

2. I am submitting this affidavit to support an Application for an Arrest Warrant under Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 41 and Title 18, United States Code, Section 3052, authorizing the arrest of **JOHN TYLER PLA**, date of birth 08/11/1995.

3. Affiant is fully familiar with the case’s facts, either due to direct personal participation in the investigation or from verbal or written reports provided to me by law enforcement officers who have participated in the investigation. In that regard, unless otherwise noted, wherever this affidavit Affiant asserts that a statement was made, the information was provided to me by a law enforcement officer, or a witness who may have had either direct or hearsay knowledge of that statement and to whom Affiant or others have spoken or whose reports your Affiant has read and reviewed. Such statements are set forth in this affidavit in substance or pertinent part unless otherwise indicated. Furthermore, since Affiant submits this

affidavit for the limited purpose of securing an Arrest Warrant, I have not included every aspect of the investigation.

4. Based upon the investigation to date, I assert probable cause exists to believe that on or about August 25, 2020, in the Northern District of Ohio, and elsewhere, **JOHN TYLER PLA** did commit a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1349, that is, Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVESTIGATION

5. On or about Wednesday, August 26, 2020, the Westlake Police Department (WPD) received a report of fraudulent activity involving a scam targeted at an 83-year-old woman, who resided in Westlake, Ohio, identified in this affidavit as VICTIM-1. According to VICTIM-1, she fell victim to a scam, the day prior, August 25, 2020, in which VICTIM-1 lost a total of \$6,000.

6. On or about Tuesday, August 25, 2020, a member of the conspiracy called VICTIM-1 on the telephone claiming to be “Mike Wallace” public defender for VICTIM-1’s grandson. Wallace claimed that the police arrested VICTIM-1’s grandson for causing a traffic crash that resulted in a tanker truck exploding. Wallace claimed that he needed \$18,000 for purported bond money. VICTIM-1 agreed to pay \$6,000.

7. On or about Tuesday, August 25, 2020, a member of the conspiracy operating a small U-Haul truck arrived at VICTIM-1’s residence in Westlake to pick up the money. VICTIM-1 gave the money to a member of the conspiracy that VICTIM-1 described as a white male wearing a white shirt, yellow shorts, and white shoes.

8. On or about Wednesday, August 26, 2020, WPD detectives made a controlled call in the assumed identity of VICTIM-1, to the phone number that Wallace used to call VICTIM-1.

The WPD detective asked for Wallace, but a member of the conspiracy now claimed to be “Walter Fisher.” Fisher requested that VICTIM-1 send more currency to post the bond for VICTIM-1’s grandson. Fisher requested the currency be sent through the mail however, Fisher did not provide a mailing address.

9. WPD reported that VICTIM-1’s neighbor captured an image of the U-Haul truck on video during the incident. The U-Haul truck had a promotional banner to include a picture of a camel on the truck. On the same date, within minutes of the theft incident, a U-Haul with the same logo was captured by city-owned cameras within proximity to VICTIM-1s residence.

10. WPD shared information related to the above scam in a law enforcement sharing network. Several agencies responded advising of the same or similar incidents recently in cities within Lake, Geauga, Summit and Cuyahoga County. Specifically, the Fairview Park Police Department contacted WPD to report they had received a complaint of a similar scam that involved suspects in a black sedan matching the description of a Chevy Malibu.

11. On or about August 28, 2020, a U-Haul truck matching the description of the truck used with VICTIM-1 was seen in the parking lot of 226 W Superior Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

12. On or about August 29, 2020, WPD went to the parking lot above and observed a U-Haul and a black Chevy Malibu bearing Illinois license plate AK15283 (Malibu) parked next to each other in the lot. WPD noted the U-Haul observed in the parking lot had the same distinguishing identifiers as the surveillance photo obtained from Westlake city cameras; specifically, an orange and yellow sticker on the cab’s roof, paperwork on the front dash, and rubber weather strip on the front windshield. At the same time, WPD observed another white male, later identified as **JOHNNY LEE PALMER** (date of birth 01/28/1995), walking around

and talking on the phone on the northside of the parking lot. **PALMER** leaned into the passenger's side of the Malibu for a short time, then walked over to the driver's side. A white male was observed in the driver's seat of a Chevy Malibu, later identified as **JOHN TYLER PLA**. **PLA** exited the driver's side and went in to the passenger's side. **PALMER** opened up the driver's side door of the U-Haul. WPD approached **PLA** and **PALMER** in the parking lot in a consensual encounter and observed a holster on **PALMER'S** person without a gun.

13. WPD spoke with **PALMER**. **PALMER** stated that he rented the Malibu. **PALMER** consented to a search of the Malibu. WPD located a Taurus G2C handgun with six 9mm rounds (serial #TMR73762) in the center armrest, a small amount of suspected marijuana, and yellow shorts similar to those worn by a member of the conspiracy who picked up the cash from VICTIM-1. The Cleveland Police Department had reported the above gun as stolen. WPD arrested **PLA** and **PALMER** for possession of the stolen gun and transported them to WPD.

14. During the consensual encounter with **PLA** and **PALMER**, a male, later identified as Leonardo H. Thompson, approached WPD and inquired about the situation. Thompson claimed to be the cousin of **PLA** and **PALMER**. WPD took a photograph of Thompson and took **PLA** and **PALMER** to the Westlake Police Department.

15. WPD advised **PLA** and **PALMER** of their Miranda rights which they waived. **PLA** stated that he rented the U-Haul truck. **PALMER** stated that they stayed at the Hampton Inn located at 1460 East 9th Street in room 1408, but checked out earlier on August 29, 2020. The Hampton Inn management staff confirmed that **PLA** and **PALMER** were staying in room 1408. **PLA** checked in on August 26, 2020, and **PALMER** checked in on August 27, 2020. They both checked out in the morning on August 29, 2020.

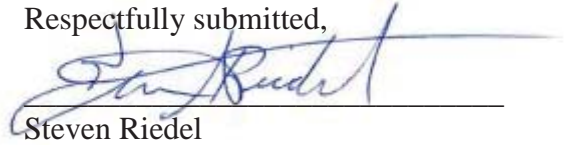
16. WPD reported that the Hampton Inn cleaning staff did not clean the room yet but entered the room to verify occupancy. Hampton Inn management allowed WPD into room 1408. WPD discovered the following items in the above room: airline tickets for **PLA** which showed a flight on July 27, 2020, from Miami, Florida to Dallas / Fort Worth, Texas to Des Moines, Iowa; an additional airline ticket for **PLA** showed a flight on August 9, 2020 from Dubuque, Iowa to Chicago, Illinois to Denver, Colorado; an airline ticket for **PALMER** on August 9, 2020 from Chicago, Illinois to Denver, Colorado; and a money transfer from **PLA** to a Donovan Harris.

17. WPD interviewed **PALMER** who admitted to picking up money at various locations in the furtherance of a national Grandparents Scam. Specifically, **PALMER** admitted that he and **PLA** committed Grandparent Scams in the greater Cleveland area. **PALMER** admitted that in one day, he scammed \$36,000 from four different elderly victims. **PALMER** admitted that he traveled with **PLA** to three other states (Iowa, Colorado, and Illinois), but denied committing any criminal activity in these states.

18. WPD obtained a search warrant to examine and analyze cellphones WPD had seized from the Malibu and U-Haul truck. WPD found that **PALMER** received information by means of wire communication in interstate commerce, writings signs, signals, pictures, and sounds, to wit: information about the victims via his cellphone. A member of the conspiracy sent **PALMER** via cell phone the full name address of the victim, a confirmation number, and the fictitious name that **PALMER** was supposed to identify himself as when he picked up the money posing as a courier from the victim. A member of the conspiracy gave **PALMER** instructions to keep his mask on when dealing with the victims and to make sure the victims stay on the phone with the other conspiracy members in this scam.

19. Based upon the foregoing, I respectfully request that a Warrant be issued authorizing law enforcement officers to arrest **JOHN TYLER PLA** for a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1349, Conspiracy to Commit Wire Fraud.

Respectfully submitted,



Steven Riedel
Special Agent
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Sworn to via telephone after submission by reliable electronic means. Fed. R. Crim. P. 3, 4(d) and 4.1.

Date: 9/11/20



William H. Baughman, Jr.
United States Magistrate Judge

